



STATE COURT ADMINISTRATION

Iowa Judicial Branch Building
1111 East Court Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50319

ROBERT D. GAST
State Court Administrator

November 30, 2022

Kraig Paulsen
Department of Management
State Capitol
LOCAL

Tim McDermott
Legislative Services
State Capitol
LOCAL

Sen. Amy Sinclair
Iowa Senate President
State Capitol
LOCAL

Rep. Pat Grassley
Speaker of the House
State Capitol
LOCAL

Sen. Julian Garrett
Chair, Senate Justice System Appropriations Committee
State Capitol
LOCAL

Rep. Brian Lohse
Chair, House Justice System Appropriations Committee
State Capitol
LOCAL

Dear Mr. Paulsen, Mr. McDermott, Senators and Representatives:

Pursuant to Iowa Code section 602.1301(2)(a), I hereby submit, on behalf of the Iowa Supreme Court, the FY24 budget request for the Iowa Judicial Branch. We would respectfully request that this budget request be passed onto the legislature as submitted to show the needs of the judicial branch.

Iowa Judicial Branch employees demonstrated strength, courage, flexibility, adaptability, and perseverance throughout the height of the pandemic. Our workforce adapted to the accelerated implementation of new technologies and work process innovations to provide timely, needed services for all Iowans. Thankfully, the challenges faced during the pandemic have lessened in this fiscal year. As we move forward with all that we have learned, it is indeed my pleasure to lead this team of dedicated public servants as we continue to improve our ability to serve Iowans.

These new processes and innovations would not be possible without the incredible team of dedicated professionals within the judicial branch. Our professionals have felt the pinch of rising inflation. Our ability to retain and recruit quality employees has been affected by the rising cost of inflation and the stagnation of judicial branch salaries.

The appropriation for FY23 helped the branch strengthen several areas of concern, especially in communities where additional district associate judges were needed to help address the disparate workload that existed. The appropriation helped those communities address juvenile justice issues by evening the workload and allowing more contact with all parties affected.

We continue to hold fast the importance of investing in communities to bring about improvements in the delivery of justice for all Iowans. The following requests will help the judicial branch maintain and increase the level of service to communities across the state.

Update on Strengthening Rural Communities Using Work Share

You may recall from previous years' communications that we were working towards work share (previously referred to as distributive work processing) projects in all judicial districts. I am very happy to report all eight districts are in some stage of work share. This work sharing will rebalance the workload among counties, and address workload fluctuations while making court services faster and more convenient. With each county providing and receiving needed support, court staff levels in the most lightly populated rural counties are sufficient enough to ensure that courthouses have enough staff members to keep court offices open for the public every work day.

Investing in Human Capital - Existing Personnel

Iowans in all 99 counties benefit from the services provided by the more than 1,700 judicial officers and employees. These judicial officers and employees are members of every community and resolve disputes to provide justice to Iowans who need assistance in the more than 700,000 cases filed every year. The education, skills, and experience of these individuals are the strongest assets of the judicial branch. Reviewing our total compensation package, and keeping it current with the public sector, allows for greater organizational and individual success which leads to a more responsive justice system for Iowans.

As noted above, both our contract and non-contract employees are affected significantly by inflation. Contract negotiations are underway and we do not want to unduly influence the outcome of those negotiations. While we are not offering a dollar amount request at this time, a revised letter will be submitted once negotiations are completed. In that revised letter, we will be asking for and submitting salary requests for, across the board increases (ATB), in grade increases (steps), and the cost of health insurance for both contract and non-contract employees.

Judges and magistrates are not immune from inflationary pressures. We are requesting a cost of living increase. The Social Security Cost of Living Adjustment for 2023 is 8.7%. Coupled with inflation, we are seeing the overall number of applicants for open judicial officer positions decline. Fewer of those applicants are in private practice. We believe non-competitive compensation to be a primary reason for the decline of applicants for judicial officer positions.

As you are aware, the judicial officer retirement system reached fully funded status last fiscal year. Due to the poor performance of system investments, the employer contribution to the fund will increase a total of \$290,000.

Investing in Human Capital - New Personnel

According to calculations using the workload formulas developed by the National Center for State Courts, Iowans needed 30 additional judges to process the current judicial branch workload. Ten of these positions were district judge positions and 20 were district associate judge positions. Thanks to the FY22 & FY23 appropriations, we were able to continue a five-year plan to address this deficit. We now have a deficit of 12 judges. We again request funding (\$1,364,118) for four district associate judges and ten related support positions (e.g. court reporters, judicial specialists, law clerks) for year three of a five-year plan.

We continuously evaluate workload in all areas of the judicial branch. Recently, the position of staff attorney for our various court levels was evaluated. In order to help facilitate better and more thorough work product, we are asking for new attorney positions with a total cost of \$779,616. We also ask for funding to fully implement best practices in finance, human resources, cybersecurity and security. The total of this request is \$847,726.

The individual judicial districts continue to evaluate their workforce needs. In order to strengthen delivery of services in individual judicial districts, we request additional funding for new positions, a total of \$260,747.

Graduated Sanctions and Court Ordered Services

As you know in FY24, funding for Graduated Sanctions and Court Ordered Services will be transferred from the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services budget to the judicial branch budget.

Indigent Defense

Judges and attorneys have told us that there is an indigent defense crisis across the state. Contract attorneys are vital to ensuring that the rights of Iowans are maintained. While not part of the judicial branch budget, the judicial branch supports efforts to increase funding for indigent defense across the state.

As I have traveled across our great state, I have listened to employee concerns. Our employees are dedicated to furthering justice in our state. Their hard work and dedication deserves to be recognized. The salary requests and new positions outlined in our request help to ensure the judicial branch will have a steadier platform on which to base continued business improvements and the administration of justice.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests. The Iowa Judicial Branch values its continued partnership with Governor Reynolds and the legislature in providing the services that all Iowans deserve from their justice system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Robert D. Gast", with a stylized, flowing script.

Robert D. Gast